

**"As Declarer Correctly *Timing* the
'Drawing' of Trump:
Sometimes *Later* Is Better Than *Immediately*"**

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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Bruce: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will talk us through "**As Declarer *Timing* the 'Drawing' of Trump: The Basic Principle When You Are 1 Trick 'Short' for Making Your Suit Contract**". Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, thanks for taking the time to be with us today!

Esther: D**n it, Bruce! How many times do I have to tell you to **NEVER, ever** call me Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Esther, because I am so "warm and caring"!

Bruce: Errr, well, sorry again about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther.

Esther: Well, Bruce. Please try to exercise at least a modicum of empathy, assuming you have at least the limited capacity to do so. Can you imagine how relentlessly all the other girls in grades K through 4 of my elementary school years relentlessly, endlessly tormented me about my last name, Klinktoast-Houstonhousen?

Bruce: Well, yes, sorry again, Esther! I do understand that young girls can indeed be quite vicious to each other.

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¹ As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in The American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Journal, https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by **Bruce Thompson**.

Well, in any case, Esther, is there anything you need to say at the outset of today's lesson?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. And yes, there is indeed something I wish to say at the outset of my bridge lesson today. The ideas in this lesson are drawn from Marc Smith's excellent article, "Play These Hands with Marc: Planning a Suit Contract," from the September, 2025 issue of the ACBL Bridge Bulletin. However, I have altered some of the cards in the examples.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, would you now present the bidding on your first example Board?

Esther: Well, Bruce, here are the N/S holdings and the bidding on Board #1:

Board #1

NORTH (7)

S: J 6 2

H: 9 6 3

D: A 6 2

C: Q T 6 2

SOUTH (16)

S: A K Q T 7 5

H: A Q J

D: 9 5 3

C: 7

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 S	PASS	2 S	PASS
4 S	PASS	PASS	PASS

On Trick #1 WEST leads the Diamond Queen from the "top" of his "touching" Diamond Honors.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, well, once the NORTH Dummy is exposed what "losers" should Declarer SOUTH see?

Esther: Well, Bruce, counting "losers" in the "long-Trump" Hand I see 1 Club "loser", 2 Diamond "losers", and possibly 1 Heart "loser" to the E/W Heart King. Thus, the 4**S** contract is in some jeopardy. But SOUTH can avoid the Heart "loser" if EAST holds the Heart King and Declarer SOUTH successfully finesse in Hearts. On this Board,

unfortunately, the Opponents were silent throughout the auction, so SOUTH has no information from the auction about how likely the finesse is to succeed or whom to finesse.

Bruce: Well, Esther, after Declarer SOUTH "wins" Trick #1 with the NORTH Dummy's Diamond Ace should SOUTH then on Tricks #2 immediately begin "drawing" Trump?

Esther: Well, Bruce, paraphrasing Smith, here is the cardinal bridge principle:

Iff ("if, and only if") you can see enough Tricks to make your contract, then "draw" Trump *as soon as possible*. This avoids the possibility that your Opponents may ruff some of your cards that otherwise would be "winners". If, on the other Hand, your contract is in *danger*, then in that case it may be best to not draw Trump right away!

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, then what should Declarer do on Trick #2 rather than "draw" Trump?

Esther: Well, Bruce, at the start of play on this Board Declarer SOUTH initially held 2, and *only* 2, entries into the North dummy: (1) the Dummy's Diamond Ace and (2) the Dummy's Trump Spade Jack. You may need both these entries to finesse twice for EAST holding the Heart King. You do not know for certain that EAST holds the Heart King, but you must assume that this is the case because this is the *only* way that your contract "makes".

On this Board on Trick #2 Declarer SOUTH leads the NORTH Dummy's Heart 3, EAST "ducks" "2nd Hand low", and Declarer SOUTH wins Tricks #2 with his Heart Jack. Now WEST did not "win" with the Heart King SOUTH now knows that EAST indeed holds the Heart King.

On Trick #3 Declarer SOUTH re-enters the NORTH Dummy by leading a "low" Spade from his "closed" Hand, to (1) draw 1 Round of Trump Spades and (2) next run a 2nd Heart finesse through EAST. On Trick #3 after the 2nd Heart finesse "wins", Declarer SOUTH *now* can safely "draw" *all* the E/W Trump Spades. SOUTH can at his leisure later "win" with his remaining Heart Ace. SOUTH will eventually "lose" 1 Club Trick and 2 Diamond Tricks and exactly "make" his 4S contract thanks to not "drawing" the Trump Spades in an *untimely* manner!

Here are the full Board #1 holdings:

Board #1

NORTH (7)

S: J 6 2

H: 9 6 3

D: A 6 2

C: Q T 6 2

WEST (7)

S: 8

H: T 8 2

D: Q J T 8

C: K J 9 5 4

EAST (10)

S: 9 4 3

H: K 7 5 4

D: K 7 4

C: A 8 3

SOUTH (16)

S: A K Q T 7 5

H: A Q J

D: 9 5 3

C: 7

Bidding

SOUTH

1**S**

4**S**

WEST

PASS

PASS

NORTH

2**S**

PASS

EAST

PASS

PASS

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther, that makes sense! Can you give us a 2nd example drawn from Smith's bridge article?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course I will try to help you. Here are the N/S holdings and the bidding on Board #2:

Board #2

NORTH (8)

S: 7 6 3 2

H: A 3 2

D: A 6 5 3

C: 9 4

WEST (6)

S: T 9 4

H: 8 5

D: J 8

C: A J 8 6 5 3

EAST (7)

S: Q J 8 5

H: 7 6 4

D: Q T 7 4

C: Q T

SOUTH (19)

S: A K

H: K Q J T 9

D: K 9 2

C: K 7 2

Bidding

SOUTH

1H

4H

WEST

PASS

PASS

NORTH

2H

PASS

EAST

PASS

PASS

On Trick #1 WEST leads the Spade Ten from the "top" of his 2 "touching" Spades.

Bruce: Errr, well, hmmm... Esther, how did SOUTH know to set the final contract at 4H?

Esther: Well, Bruce, it is true that in most Partnerships NORTH might have bid 2H, a "constructive" raise, holding only 6 or so HCPs. So, N/S together may have held $19 + 8 = 27$ HCPs. But HCPs are not so relevant when playing Suit contracts, as Marty Bergen so eloquently suggested in the title of his 1996 bridge book, Points Schmoints!, which won the Outstanding Bridge Book of the Year from the American Bridge Teachers' Association. This where Bergen in the first few pages of the book introduced his bridge "**Rule of 20**" which says that you can, and should, open with a Suit bid if the sum of (1) your HCPs and (2) the number of cards in your "longest" 2 Suits equals 20 or more!

As you know Bruce, there are roughly 40 or so such bridge "rules", many of which are summarized in the "Esther Bridge Lesson" "**Some of the 40 or So Bridge Bidding/Play 'Rules'**": <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/rules.pdf>

The bridge "**Rule of 5**" says, if you as Opener open bidding by bidding a 1-level Major, and your Partner gives you a "constructive raise" showing 3+ cards and 7-10 HCPs, you

can pretty safely bid a Game-level contract, if your count of missing Aces, Kings, and Queens **across all 4 suits** is **5** or less.² If your count of these missing honors is **7** or more, it is very unlikely that you can make a Game contract, and you should instead stop at a part-score contract. If your count of these missing honors is **6**, you may or may not be able to make a Game contract.

Bruce: Errr, well, hmmm... Well, Esther, once the NORTH Dummy is exposed what "losers" can Declarer SOUTH see?

Esther: Well, Bruce, from the perspective of the Declarer's Hand, Declarer SOUTH can see as "losers" **1** Diamond and possibly **3** Clubs depending on where the Club Ace sits.

Bruce: Well, Esther, after Declarer SOUTH "wins" Trick **#1** in his "closed" Hand should SOUTH immediately begin "drawing" Trump?

Esther: Well, Bruce, no! Declarer SOUTH instead must avoid having any more than **2** Club "losers" to pair with his 1 Diamond "loser". So, on Trick **#2** Declarer SOUTH leads a "low" Club. SOUTH's plan is to "attack" Clubs and ruff Declarer's **3rd** Round of Clubs in the NORTH Dummy even if this involves ruffing SOUTH's Club King. After that ruff then Declarer SOUTH can safely "draw" Trump!

Bruce: WOW, Esther! You are amazing!

Esther: Well, Bruce, thank you very much for saying that! As you know, I do indeed try to help you!

² The Savannah Club Grand Life Master who some members call "Yoda" taught me this Rule, but she could not remember who taught it to her. Note: Compute the "test value" for the "**Rule of 5**" taking into account distribution and adjusting for missing honors in "short" Suits. For example, Esther as Opener bidding **1S** recently held:

S: A K T 8 7 6 **H:** K 9 8 **D:** A K **C:** A 3

and she counted as "missing" "top" Honors **1** Spade, **2** Hearts, **0** Diamonds, and **1** Club, $1 + 2 + 0 + 1 = 4$ and she then bid **4S**.